

Legislative Wrap-up 2004

Spring 2004

Dear Neighbors:

Last year, we faced the toughest state budget crisis in a generation. We had to fill a \$2.6 billion hole – without a general tax increase – while protecting good jobs and preserving our quality schools. We had to make hard choices, but we did what we believed was best for Washington.

Though 2004 was another difficult year, we saw early signs of an improving economy. We did what we could to keep the momentum.

This was the year we improved the state's job climate by reauthorizing tax credits for high-tech jobs in rural areas and streamlining regulations affecting our state's businesses.

This was the year we made investments in education, trying to make a difference in every classroom and for every kid.

This was the year we kept health care within reach for children in low-income families and restored funding for basic human services for abused children, the mentally ill, and the developmentally disabled.

We kept our commitment to solve problems, working with Democrats and Republicans alike. We consider it an honor to serve the people of the 24th District. Please contact us at our offices if you have questions or need an explanation on any state issue.

Sincerely,



Sen. Jim Hargrove
State Senator



Rep. Lynn Kessler
State Representative



Sen. Jim Hargrove



Rep. Lynn Kessler

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New Primary System Adopted

You told us loud and clear that you liked the state's blanket primary and didn't want it changed. We agree. Unfortunately, when the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the state's blanket primary was unconstitutional, we had to explore different options.

Legislators settled on a "top-two" system that is similar to the system that had been in place for 69 years. The governor, however, used his line-item veto power to create a different system, similar to one used in Montana. The Montana system requires voters to pick a party's ballot - Democratic, Republican, or other - but won't keep records of voters' choices, keeping that rightfully private.

It's imperfect. Residents of the 24th District made it clear that we prefer to vote for a person, not a party. The system may ultimately end up in court, which means we will begin work again.

Jobs and the Economy

We believe that trained and educated workers are the backbone of a strong economy. Good jobs with benefits are essential to healthy families and safe communities, while low-paying jobs without benefits put additional strains on social services. We worked on these job-related issues during the 2004 Legislature:

- **Rural Tax Incentives for Technology Businesses**

Most rural communities have not seen the benefits of Seattle's technology industry. This year, we helped sustain technology-based businesses in rural counties by providing credits against business-and-occupation taxes until 2011. This will keep them growing here, creating jobs and revenue in the process.

- **Port Angeles Graving Dock**

Construction of the Port Angeles graving dock, which had been delayed after the discovery of Lower Elwha Klallam ancestral remains and artifacts, is scheduled to resume in August. We worked with DOT and the local community to put together an agreement with the Tribe. By doing the construction work on the Hood Canal Bridge pontoons in Port Angeles,

hundreds of jobs will be created. The Legislature also approved a transportation budget which fully allocates the \$275 million for the project so that funding will not be an issue as the work goes forward.

- **Small Business Incubators**

Small businesses employ more than 40 percent of Washington's workforce. This year, we continued to build a strong foundation for new and emerging companies by supporting the Small Business Incubator (SBI) Program. Also, the state awarded a \$250,000 grant and a \$750,000 loan to finish the Clallam Business Incubator at the Lincoln Center. Small business incubators assist companies in economically distressed or disadvantaged areas with overhead, paperwork, and site assistance. They are proven tools to promote responsible, sustainable economic growth and jobs.

Outsourcing

Simply put, outsourcing means taking jobs away from Washington workers. We were outraged to learn that, according to a preliminary study, many state agencies outsource work overseas. We need to better under-



The Port Angeles graving dock located on 20 acres of waterfront will create and keep jobs in Clallam County for at least the next 25 years. The graving dock will aid repairs to Washington's floating bridges, including the Hood Canal Bridge and the Evergreen Point floating bridge across Lake Washington.

stand the scope and nature of this outsourcing. This is critical and must be a priority in 2005.

Health and Human Services

Once again this year, we were able to pass a budget without a general tax increase. Because of savings from last year, we shored up children's services, health care, and safety measures that could have been lost when the state faced-down its fiscal woes.

- **Access to Health Care**

We increased access to health care by passing two bills that will help people in low-income and rural areas who need more health care options.

The bills help keep volunteer doctors and other health care providers working for low-income patients, especially those in our rural communities. HB 2787 expands the Good Samaritan Act by giving the valuable volunteers immunity from civil lawsuits, and HB 2788 pays for liability insurance for volunteer physicians working in low-income clinics and hospitals.

- **Affordable Health Insurance for Small Business**

We passed HB 2460, which allows insurance companies to offer an "economy plan" to businesses with 50 or fewer employees. Access to this affordable plan should benefit both employees and business owners.

- **Medicaid for Kids**

We crafted a sensible approach to virtually eliminate premiums on children's Medicaid coverage. Kids in most families with less than \$30,000 annual income won't have to pay for basic health care. With this coverage, kids are less likely to miss school or end up in emergency rooms for preventable illnesses.

Education

Education is a smart investment. It helps children and adults prepare for a career and pays dividends to state and local economies by getting people employed. Education issues in the 2004 Legislature included:

- **Washington Assessment of Student Learning**

The Legislature passed HB 2195 to allow students additional chances to pass the state's Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) exam. Previously, the WASL was a one-shot deal. Rather than water down the standards, we opted to give students additional chances to pass the test.

- **Higher Education**

We must keep the doors of our colleges and universities open to educate and train our workforce for 21st Century jobs. State business leaders have called higher education the "fuel" in our economic engine. This year we made a down payment for improvements in higher education by adding new enrollments and upgrading campus facilities.

- **Capital Budget Funding for Community Colleges**

The Legislature passed a capital budget that expands and improves our state's higher education facilities. The budget includes more than \$19 million to replace the Instructional Building at Grays Harbor College and \$1 million for the design phase of a building to replace Peninsula College's Science and Technology Building.



Other Issues

- **Clean Water Data**

We have to make sure we're making decisions based on accurate, reliable data. Good information leads to good decisions. And bad decisions can have serious economic impacts on our communities. The state Department of Ecology will be required to use credible data when developing water quality standards under SB 5957, approved by the Legislature.

- **Simplified Timber Tax**

The Legislature passed HB 2693, which provides a simple, fair taxing structure on timber and provides funds to timber counties that have been most impacted by cuts in funding since the economic downturn affected local communities.

Dear Friends:

I was particularly pleased that the Legislature passed a bill I had sponsored to improve mental health communications. It

took the tragic death of 4-year-old Lyle Smith to reveal the gaping holes in communication between state, county and community mental health care providers, the Department of Corrections (DOC), and the courts.

Under previous law, there was no legal requirement or authorization to share critical information about an individual who is under court-ordered chemical dependency or mental health treatment and under the supervision of the DOC.

I introduced SB 6358 to give all parties access to the same information in order to better evaluate someone's condition. I'm just as focused on preventing future crimes as I am on meting out just punishment to existing offenders. Well-informed decisions will make for safer communities.

Sen. Jim Hargrove



Dear Friends:

With our biggest budget problems in the rearview mirror, health and safety were high priorities this year. I

introduced two bills to

provide rural communities and low-income residents with better access to needed health care. The first (HB 2787) helps volunteer licensed health-care workers work in nonprofit community clinics, exempting the volunteers from certain lawsuits. The second (HB 2788) pays for liability insurance for doctors who volunteer services for low-income patients at community clinics and hospitals.

Protecting victims of domestic violence was also a priority, and I was pleased the Legislature passed my bill (HB 1645) to help them. I introduced the bill that allows victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking to terminate leases or rental agreements without penalty. Finding a new home is a big barrier for victims trying to escape bad situations. They need to be able to move to safety.

Rep. Lynn Kessler



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